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The European Union and the Mediterranean

Michelle Pace

Introduction

European Union (EU)–Mediterranean relations have, from the 1960s to date, come to symbolize the parallel shift in the policy-making literature from ‘government to governance’. This new process of EU governing of Mediterranean relations at a distance has been characterized by a move from ‘rowing to steering’, or in other words, a new process of governing which aims to encourage and privilege Mediterranean partners’ initiatives in this relation. On paper and in principal, this move has shifted EU policies in the Mediterranean from top-down, bureaucratic and technical control of Mediterranean relations to co-operative, joint, co-ownership of EU-Mediterranean relations’ processes, with the aim of having greater visibility of these processes among citizens. In practice, this relationship is still fraught with huge challenges, not least due to the recent negative course which the Israeli–Palestinian conflict has taken, the embedded distrust between Arab Mediterranean partners and the lack of a unified voice from these same partners.

In this chapter I conceptually draw upon Bang’s (2003) definition of governance as an interactive mode of political communication and apply this (understanding of governance) to EU-Mediterranean relations. Moreover, I move beyond relations between political authorities to include lay people in Mediterranean communities—that is, the direct recipients of EU policies on the Mediterranean. Mediterranean communities are thus taken as structured and being continuously structured by the values, norms and authority structures not just of their Mediterranean political systems (or what Khouri (2009) calls an assortment of values ranging from tribal, Arab nationalism, state-centred to democratic values), but also of international organizations such as the EU. Thus, an interdisciplinary approach is applied here: one that adopts the work of Bang (2003) to EU-Mediterranean relations. EU governance of the Mediterranean is thus not only about securing the effectiveness of political decisions and actions, but also about how political and social order is constituted (through the securitization of the Mediterranean), and about freedoms and equality (or lack of them) in the Mediterranean region. How far do EU policies towards the Mediterranean go in empowering the very targets of these policies, that is, people in the Mediterranean? Do EU policies encourage the everyday political engagement of Mediterranean peoples? Why is it that, at its grassroots, Arab society remains passive and frustrated both with its Arab regimes and with external actors like the EU?
Thus, this case offers an interesting insight into the role that the EU can play outside of its own territorial borders, and therefore upon patterns of global governance. Empirically, the chapter briefly takes a look at EU policies towards the Mediterranean from the 1960s to date. It does this by scrutinizing the EU’s governance of the south.

**Euro-Mediterranean relations: A sporadic spread of fora from the 1960s to date**

Throughout the 1960s, EU-Mediterranean relations were governed through bilateral, economic agreements. The then European Community (EC) signed trade agreements, granting southern manufactured products free or preferential access to the European Economic Community (EEC) market with various Mediterranean countries. A specified selection of agricultural products (a core competitive advantage sector in the Mediterranean) was granted only limited access.

The EC’s governing of the south took a slight turn during the 1970s when, with France taking a leadership role, it adopted the Global Mediterranean Policy (GMP) and signed cooperation and association agreements with Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. These new agreements were designed to support economic development processes in these Mediterranean countries (Pace 2006). In the wake of the oil crisis, the EC also attempted to establish further co-operation with Arab Mediterranean countries, via the Arab League, through the Euro–Arab Dialogue. However, the Arab League insisted on a condition—namely, that the Palestinian issue be firmly placed on the Dialogue’s agenda: a condition which was, at the time, unacceptable to the Europeans. Therefore, the Middle East conflict marked from the start of EU-Mediterranean relations a sore point which was to remain the case for many decades thereafter. When co-operation was limited and focused on ‘non-sensitive’, low-politics areas, such as the environment, the governance of EU-Mediterranean relations flourished. This was the case when, for example, in 1976, within the framework of the Barcelona Convention, the Action Plan for the Mediterranean was formulated to combat pollution of the Mediterranean Sea: this was quite a successful endeavour (Adler et al. 2006).

During the 1980s, several important global events had a direct impact on EU governance of its external relations with its southern partners: the Berlin Wall fell, the communist bloc disintegrated and the EC enlarged to include Spain and Portugal. Outside of EU-Mediterranean relations there were a few active ‘Mediterranean, sub-regional’ initiatives such as the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU, or UMA—Union du Maghreb Arabe), founded in 1987. This initiative comprised Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia.

In 1990, the EC initiated the New or Renovated Mediterranean Policy (NMP or RMP), which mainly dealt with financial aid to the southern partners. As a step away from European powers’ colonial legacy in the Mediterranean, Italy and Spain promoted the idea of trust-building measures by way of a Conference on Security and Cooperation in the Mediterranean (CSCM). This idea was also aimed at strengthening regional stability (a major European objective given the perceived conflict-ridden view of the Mediterranean, thus the logic behind the EC’s initiative was that economic development via financial aid would bring about changes at the political level in the south). During these times, Europeans were very concerned with the increasing rise in social, political and economic crises in several Mediterranean countries, not least in Algeria, where after the election results were overturned (in 1992), a civil war broke out. This was also the time of the first Gulf War (Pace 2006). A joint French–Egyptian initiative in 1994 led to the Mediterranean Forum which played a role in giving Mediterranean partners a voice and a platform to air their concerns. It thus created an environment where the Forum’s non-EU members’ preoccupations with envisaged stricter EU immigration policies could be expressed (Johansson 2002).
Throughout the 1960s, 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s, EU relations were restricted to elitist levels by way of state-to-state co-operation between political authorities in EU member states and the Mediterranean. Mediterranean local/provincial authorities, civil society associations and citizens at large were not engaged in relations with foreign, European counterparts: many also lacked the necessary competences and power to do so. Moreover, Mediterranean societies were not progressing economically, let alone politically and socially, along a similar pace to their European counterparts.

In its attempt to cope with its failure to govern its southern back yard, and encouraged by progress on the Middle East peace process (1991 Madrid conference peace talks, the ensuing Oslo agreement of 1993 and the Israel–Jordan peace treaty of 1994), the EU launched a comprehensive economic, political, social and cultural initiative in 1995: the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP), or Barcelona Process.¹

The EMP was very much focused on form and procedure: the EU at this stage was keen to ensure that the governing of migration flows from the south was kept under control. In the eyes of EU actors, this required continuous trade and economic development in Mediterranean countries, stability and regular dialogue with its southern partners. Thus, the EMP includes three baskets for the development of a political and security ‘partnership’, an economic and financial ‘partnership’ and a ‘partnership’ in social, cultural and human affairs (European Commission 1995). Critic (Pace 2006; Bicchi 2007) have argued that the initiative, launched as an EU framework policy, is Eurocentric and that it was presented to the Mediterranean partners as a fait accompli.

Under the third basket (social, cultural and human affairs) the EU opted for a cautious bottom-up approach to political change in the Mediterranean through its support of civil society organizations—albeit of a selected and co-opted kind. This flawed EU conception of civil society in the Mediterranean was brought to the fore when it became evident that the EU only deals with a limited core of secular, liberal groups that speak the EU’s language, and excludes, for instance, groups inspired by religious faith. The EU has only been willing to offer limited civil support to partners that are known to and approved by ‘partner’ governments in the south (Gillespie and Whitehead 2002: 197).

Interestingly, in 2001 the Commission issued a white paper entitled ‘European Governance’ (European Commission 2001a). The EU’s reflections on the need to reform internal governance is recognized as a necessary step for the enhancement of its governance at an international level:

The objectives of peace, growth, employment and social justice pursued within the Union must also be promoted outside for them to be effectively attained at both European and global level. This responds to citizens’ expectations for a powerful Union on a world stage. Successful international action reinforces European identity and the importance of shared values within the Union. In applying the principles of good governance to the EU’s global responsibility, the Union should be more accessible to governmental and non-governmental stakeholders from other parts of the world. This is already part of its strategy for sustainable development, but it must go hand in hand with a commitment by such stakeholders as to their representativity and that they will assume their responsibilities in responding to global challenges. The Union should take the global dimension into account in assessing the impact of policies, in establishing guidelines for the use of expertise, and through a more pro-active approach to international networks.

(European Commission 2001a: 26–27, emphasis added)

On the 10th anniversary of the Barcelona Process in November 2005, the missing elements in EU governing of Mediterranean relations became very evident: many Arab officials boycotted
the summit. Thus far, the interests of European states and, to some extent, those of Mediterranean partners, had been prioritized. However, there is a big gap by way of a shared narrative which requires deeply entrenched communication at the political, economic and social level beyond elitist networks of government officials (Neumann 2002). This void can be partially filled by the flourishing of an active and independent civil society and other social networks—a move towards what Bang (2004) refers to as culture governance. The challenge, however, remains: how can Mediterranean people determine, in practice, the content, meaning and direction of Euro-Mediterranean endeavours, given their full recognition of the powerlessness of Arab Mediterranean citizens, their permanent subjugation at the hands of their autocratic rulers and their ensuing chronic passivity (Khouri 2009)? Governance by way of political communication between Arab regimes and their societies is simply non-existent.

Arab governments, for their part, are fully aware of their vulnerability to their peoples’ political, economic and social frustrations. With the aim of offering people some hope (albeit at an artificial level), and as a measure to speed up the liberalization of trade between Mediterranean countries themselves (a core objective of the EMP), Tunisia, Morocco, Egypt and Jordan formed the Agadir Initiative in 2002 to provide for free trade between these four countries: and with the European Commission providing technical support for its implementation. Underlying such an initiative is, once again, the flawed assumption that somehow economic development will automatically (or through some spill-over effect) lead to political change, stability and security in the Mediterranean. This has been the ‘European talk’ and message that Arab regimes are only too happy to oblige and transmit to their societies. The persistence of authoritarian regimes in the Mediterranean/ Middle East region, however, attests to another reality (Pace 2008).

In preparation for the 2004 ‘big bang’ enlargement process (to encompass 10 new member states from Central and Eastern Europe and the two Mediterranean islands, Cyprus and Malta), the EU sought to give a fresh impetus to its relations with the southern neighbours through the 2003 European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). Initially aimed at the new neighbours to the east of the EU’s enlarged borders, the ENP eventually incorporated the Mediterranean neighbours to the south (European Commission 2003a). Originally called Wider Europe, this new co-operation initiative is characterized by new arrangements reflecting policy learning at the EU level: a recognition that previous policies towards its neighbours have had their pitfalls. Moving from the previous EMP approach, whereby Mediterranean partner countries were conceived of as one region and addressed mainly through a regional approach, the new ENP initiative sought to differentiate between different neighbouring countries of the EU—both to the east and to the south. The key idea behind the ENP is that each partner country engages with the EU depending on its willingness and capacity to progress with economic and political reform. Rather than adopt negative, political conditionality, the EU sought to establish Action Plans with neighbouring countries which clearly outline benchmarks of the actions that the EU expects the partner countries to implement. Some authors have described the ENP as the primary instrument through which EU governance is externalized: the EU is keen to maintain its neighbouring borders as safe and secure as possible from perceived external threats and risks such as illegal migration, environmental degradation and economic crisis (Gänzle 2006). Thus, EU economic and political interests remain a priority. Moreover, the EU thus far fails to explicate how exactly political developments in Mediterranean neighbouring countries are to be measured effectively and how these processes are to be monitored: what does the EU mean exactly by benchmarks? Which criteria are to be used to measure these benchmarks? What are these benchmarks aiming to achieve (Del Sarto and Schumacher 2009)?

EU and Mediterranean officials agree that there is now a sporadic spread of fora on Euro-Mediterranean relations: what is needed is rather fewer fora, less-frequent meetings (at high
level) and more concentrated encounters on a specific theme with the involvement of specific European and Mediterranean actors. This conclusion may well have been what inspired the then candidate for the presidency of France, Nicolas Sarkozy, to outline the structure of (yet) another initiative for the Mediterranean, initially entitled ‘Mediterranean Union’ (Sarkozy 2007a). Sarkozy acknowledged that the Barcelona Process had failed in its main objective of bringing about prosperity, security and political reform as outlined in the Barcelona Declaration of 1995. He insisted that it was the Mediterranean countries that needed to take the initiative as the Mediterranean is for the Mediterraneans (Gillespie 2008; Soler i Lecha 2008):

I wish to send out a message to all the peoples of the Mediterranean to say to them that it is in the Mediterranean where everything is at stake, that we must overcome hatred to give way to a great dream of peace and civilization. I wish to say that the time has come to build together the Mediterranean Union which will be a point of union between Europe and Africa.

(Sarkozy 2007a)

Thus, the most recent attempt by the EU at governing its southern Mediterranean neighbourhood was launched during the French Presidency of 2008 and was eventually called the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM). The change in title signifies the intermittent yet intense negotiations that led to serious modifications to Sarkozy’s original intentions. In May 2007, following his election as President of France, Sarkozy reiterated his ideas for the Mediterranean but from then onwards was pressured by the Commission as well as European and Mediterranean foreign ministries to clarify his proposal. It was in Tangiers in October 2007 that Sarkozy acknowledged that although the EMP and the ENP must continue, these were not sufficient mechanisms to construct a strong Mediterranean neighbourhood. Emphasizing how Europe was constructed around co-operation on coal and steel, he insisted that the Mediterranean countries must commit themselves to what he called ‘concrete solidarities’ and ‘pragmatic projects’, building around sustainable development, energy, transport and water (Sarkozy 2007b). Thus, the rationale behind the UfM is what one author refers to as a strategy of ‘rational pragmatism’—an acknowledgement of the realities, obstacles, constraints and challenges in the Mediterranean and a reflection of policy learning from the part of the French President (Chater 2009).

The main idea behind this UfM initiative was to resuscitate the EU’s Mediterranean policy. Given the failures of past endeavours in key strategic areas, many Euro-Mediterranean officials welcomed Sarkozy’s provocative initiative. Germany largely opposed the idea as it was deemed a unilateral French initiative and called for the initiative to be Europeanized. Spain was equally concerned that the UfM would rather jeopardize the EMP/Barcelona Process and weaken the crucial role Spain had played in the EU’s Mediterranean initiative of 1995. However, Spain endorsed France’s ‘return’ to Mediterranean issues although it emphasized the need (like Germany) for the EU to be included as much as possible. The name of the latest initiative was thus eventually confirmed as the ‘Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean’ (Council of the European Union 2008b) to emphasize that the UfM revitalizes and complements rather than replaces the EMP:

The Mediterranean region is an area of vital strategic importance to the European Union in political, economic and social terms. The Barcelona Process has been the central instrument for Euro-Mediterranean relations since 1995 and has allowed the strong promotion of multilateral and bilateral cooperation. Building on and reinforcing previous successes, the ‘Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean’ will inject further momentum
into the Union’s relations with the Mediterranean. It will complement ongoing bilateral relations which will continue within existing policy frameworks.

(European Commission 2008d)

Although the original idea to have a new Mediterranean Union for just the coastal states was abandoned, the scene was set for President Sarkozy to preside at the summit meeting of EU and southern Mediterranean leaders in Paris on 13 July 2008. There remained, however, a major concern. In light of the increasing securitization of the Mediterranean especially since the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, the creation of the Barcelona Process: UfM overshadowed principled issues of the protection of human rights and the promotion of democracy in the southern Mediterranean. European-Mediterranean co-operation in the field of anti-terrorism legislation had, since 11 September 2001, intensified at the expense of civil liberties (Schumacher 2008).

Evaluating the EU’s most recent Mediterranean initiative (the UfM) in terms of theories of governance

At the rhetorical level, at least, there is an acknowledgement in the recent French UfM proposal that previous EU initiatives towards the Mediterranean had failed precisely because the political will for implementation of good intentions and ideals has been absent. The emergence of a new policy thus shows that there was a window of opportunity for reviewing previous policies and for examining options for enhanced Euro-Mediterranean co-operation on key specific projects and actions on the ground (developments that can be measured) such as water management, environmental protection, energy co-operation, the fight against pollution in the Mediterranean Sea, sea highways, solar power and other sustainable development projects.

In terms of theories of governance (Bang 2003), the EU’s new approach to the Mediterranean in terms of politics (process), policy (content) and polity (structure) has been as follows:

Process:

The Sarkozy initial proposal envisaged interested Mediterranean partners from the north and south to be fully engaged in specific actions, at the same time acknowledging that:

… given the extent of existing activities, it would seem advisable that there should be no broad-ranging political decision … without a prior review on a case-by-case basis of existing projects and of the nature of weaknesses in the status quo. Each case would best be the subject of a report prepared by one or more independent experts …

(Emerson 2008: 10)

Therefore, in terms of process, one can detect an acknowledgement over the decades of EU-Mediterranean relations of the need to focus on concrete projects, and more importantly on actions rather than rhetoric. In other words, a recognition of the need to incorporate, in the EU’s framing of the Mediterranean, issue and policy networks into processes of governing, and thus the development of more reflexive (from EMP to ENP to UfM) and responsive policy tools (Bang 2003: 2).

The role of the EU is thus shifting towards a focus on providing shared experiences and practices as well as support to Mediterranean-led initiatives, building equal partnerships and encouraging co-ownership and co-ordination.
Content:
The UfM builds on the bilateral approach inherent in the ENP whereby a competitive, regatta type of spirit is entrenched within the EU’s logic: southern Mediterranean partners are encouraged to pursue their national-specific ambitions through a competitive determination of who gets closest to the EU first by way of a privileged partnership or ‘advanced status’. This shifts EU-Mediterranean dynamics away from the model of regional integration as envisioned in the EMP (and building on the ideal, model and rationale of EU integration) and of sub-regional co-operation inherent in the Agadir Initiative. Therefore, although the UfM, rooted in the idea of a union of projects, responds to the expectations of some Mediterranean partner governments, including those of Israel, Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia, it fails to address the hopes for change of the people in the Mediterranean (Driss 2009).

Structure:
The structure of the UfM is based on a shared presidency between North and South, the aim being to increase co-ownership of the process and to give it more political authority via regular summits to be held every two years (Aliboni and Ammor 2009; EurActiv 2009). However, challenges remain among Mediterranean partners with the emergence of ‘negotiated self-governance’. The co-presidency is composed of an EU and a non-EU president in an attempt to prevent or minimize existing asymmetries between the two shores of the Mediterranean. While the EU has existing mechanisms that allow for a co-ordinated position for its 27 member states (the EU president is appointed by rotation), southern Mediterranean partners do not have a similar facility at their disposal (the non-EU president is selected by consensus). Thus, although the UfM is, in principal, based on new practices of co-ordinating activities through networks and partnerships, there is always the possibility that such ideals are disrupted by Arab partners’ refusal to have an Israeli president or Arab opposition to a particular non-EU president representing the southern members. There is also doubt about the supposedly co-ordinated mechanism of the Arab states, as represented by the Arab League’s observer status within the UfM (granted in November 2008 when the foreign ministers of UfM countries met in Marseilles).9

Moreover, the prescribed summits have been stalled since the Israeli incursion into Gaza of December 2008–January 2009. Rather than taking a leadership role and availing Arab states of an institutional opportunity offered by the UfM policy, Egypt (sharing the co-presidency with France) deferred all UfM activities. The crisis that followed included Egypt’s tightening of the Rafah crossing from Gaza and the severe restriction of movement even of Gazans requiring urgent medical help. The Egyptian people were joined by their Arab counterparts in labelling their government a ‘traitor government’ and a betrayer of the Arab nation’s national cause (AlQuds AlArabiya, 3 January 2009).10 Thus, although UfM summits are supposed to have more clout because of the presence of heads of state and government, at a very high, political level, these fora are far from the realities experienced by Mediterranean societies.

Conclusion
This chapter has attempted to briefly cover EU governance of the Mediterranean since the 1960s. This relationship has been characterized by the leadership role taken over the decades mainly by specific EU member states: France during the 1970s with the GMP (jointly with Egypt during the early 1990s), and more recently with the UfM initiative and Spain during the 1990s with the EMP.
At the time of writing, EU-Mediterranean relations were taking a narrative turn. There was evidence of EU policy learning from past policies towards the Mediterranean (Ardizone 2009). The most recent French initiative on the Mediterranean, in 2007, showed, despite its critics, a new approach to EU governance of the Mediterranean—governance by listening to the different stories that constitute political life in the region. EU-Mediterranean relations have, since the 1960s, been constructed as a set of multiple discursive practices.

However, challenges in EU-Mediterranean relations remain with: a) the need for a broadening of the focus of governance beyond institutional concerns to encompass the involvement of an active and independent civil society in this process; and b) the lack of real political communication between EU actors and Mediterranean partners and between EU member states themselves, and Mediterranean partners themselves. (To this we can add the lack of political communication between Mediterranean regimes and their societies.) The EU has, in fact, not managed to change the parameters within which Mediterranean political authorities and political regimes operate. Mediterranean regimes are not accountable to secure the success and democratic effectiveness of their rule and decision-making processes and procedures. The EU is thus complicit in furthering authoritarianism in this region.

The EU’s rhetoric over the decades has been about entering into dialogue with Mediterranean partners, reaching agreement through consensus, creating solidarities, extending participation, empowering people and respecting difference. What, though, is the difference on the ground in southern societies? What has the EU’s role and impact upon Mediterranean societies actually been (Pace 2009)? There has always been an element of contingency in EU-Mediterranean relations, not least because of events in the Middle East Peace Process. EU-Mediterranean relations are doomed to exist within an environment of good intentions, but these abound within the ambiguity of the political, economic, social and legal contexts of Arab reality.

Perhaps what we have in EU-Mediterranean relations are temporary islands of order which occur amid disorder and are drawn from differences situated in time and space (rather than any social or political order). Day-to-day governing appears to be complex, layered interaction processes between a variety of actors with diverse interests and agendas. If governance is reconsidered and EU and Mediterranean partners rethink governance as being a contingent product involving political struggles and competing sets of beliefs, and about learning, then we can look at the trajectory of EU-Mediterranean relations as a series of learning events.

In terms of the EU’s ability to influence external countries/regions, this case highlights that this EU leverage largely depends on how close neighbouring countries are to the EU (geographic proximity), as well as on EU member states’ interests in the region under scrutiny. Hypothetically, the closer neighbours are to the EU, the more impact we expect from EU practices in terms of norm diffusion and development (shared practices and accompanying constructivist accounts). The EU’s ability to influence countries, moreover, depends on the regional role a particular country plays as, for instance, Syria’s role in the wider Middle East region (Cavatorta and Gomez Arana 2009). Discursive approaches, on the other hand, emphasize the conditions of the EU’s international action: the current EU of 27 member states does not allow for fixed loci and bases of authority. Thus, we do not have a single unitary voice in the EU’s current governance structure. Finally, this empirical study of practice of the EU’s international governance shows how practices at the elitist level remain very far from the realities experienced by societies of the ‘target’ states of EU governance.

Notes
1 The EMP’s members include all EU member states together with Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, the Palestinian Autonomous Areas, Syria, Tunisia and Turkey. Libya has observer
status. It was launched solely at the ministerial level: EMP technical meetings bring together ambassadors and experts, but not heads of states and governments.

2 Arab officials were said to be disappointed with the lack of progress under the EMP’s umbrella, particularly the EMP’s inability to achieve its objectives: asymmetries between northern and southern members persist and the Arab partners’ hope that the EMP would help in resolving their conflicts has been muted.

3 Europe’s concern with controlling migration flows from the south and its interest in energy sources from the Mediterranean—equally shared by some partners such as Algeria—are just some examples. Tunisia, being the first Mediterranean country to implement its zone of free trade with the EU, is interested in furthering this national development (the EMP aimed to develop a free trade zone in the whole Euro-Mediterranean area by 2010—see Pace 2006). Morocco is interested in reinforcing an ‘advanced status’ or privileged relation with the EU, while Israel is keen to ‘upgrade’ its relations with the EU.

4 Author’s interviews with various European and Mediterranean officials, in the Palestinian Autonomous Areas in September 2007, Egypt in March 2008, Brussels during March and April 2009, and Malta during April 2009.

5 The UfM’s members include all 27 EU member states and the Commission, 12 Mediterranean countries (Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Mauritania, Monaco, Morocco, the Palestinian Autonomous Areas, Syria, Tunisia and Turkey; Libya is sceptical—see Goldirova 2008), and four Balkan countries bordering the Mediterranean, namely Albania, Montenegro, Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina.


8 Interview by the author, Permanent Representative office of France in Brussels, 1 April 2009.


10 The author wishes to thank Dina Hadad for her assistance in translating this article.

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